
Off-the-Cuff**Secretary-General's press encounter with Israeli President Shimon Peres
Jerusalem, 16 August 2013**

It is a great pleasure to visit Israel again. This is my sixth time to visit Israel as Secretary-General of the United Nations. My visit is taking place at a crucially important timing when both parties have begun very important negotiations to achieve a two-state solution. President Peres and I just had a very constructive meeting covering matters of our common concern particularly focussing on how the Middle East Peace Process can move forward smoothly.

The President and I agree that direct negotiations remain the single most credible path to a solution.

Respecting their confidentiality is a sign of how seriously the parties regard these talks.

I commend the efforts of the United States, particularly Secretary of State John Kerry, and the commitment of the Palestinian and Israeli leadership.

I am also encouraged by the recent commitment made by the Arab leaders to reviving the 2002 Arab Peace Initiative for regional stability.

This is a critical moment for Israel and the region.

I talked with President Peres about how the United Nations, including my Special Coordinator Robert Serry, and the international community can support progress towards a final status agreement that will make the two- state solution a reality.

We must dispel the deep scepticism bred by 20 years of stalemate.

I urge all parties to avoid actions that risk undermining the negotiations.

Both sides need to sustain an environment conducive for the peace process to move forward.

People need to see improvements on the ground, including economic progress for Palestinians in the West Bank and Gaza, and greater security for Israelis and Palestinians.

I know that Israelis are watching developments in their neighbourhood with great concern. We do not know where the fighting in Syria will lead. We wonder what will happen across the border in Egypt. I recall my last visit in November when rocket fire from Gaza caused some Israeli parents to send their children to shelters instead of schools. I understand these concerns, and I understand the legitimate security concerns of the Israeli people and Government. Their legitimate security concerns should be respected and protected. And as I have said it is unacceptable that Israelis should have to live in perpetual fear.

President Peres is striving for peace so that Israeli children can grow up in security with Israel as a normal part of the region along side Palestine. I believe Israel has much to contribute regionally and internationally. But to realize that potential we need peace in this region. Genuine peace, as President Peres recognizes, requires leadership and compromise. I hope all Israelis will do their part in helping to achieve this vision.

The United Nations, and myself as Secretary-General of the United Nations, will spare no effort to complement and facilitate this ongoing process.

Thank you.